

Abortion, Family, Queerness and Private Property

**with
Sophie
Lewis**



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This week, Scott and William talk to Sophie Lewis, author of *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family* and the soon-to-be-released *Abolish The Family: A Manifest for Care and Liberation* (out in October, 2022) about the current political moment that is characterized by attacks on trans people and peoples reproductive abilities. They also talk through what creates this moment, where trans people come into the target of State power being weaponized by the far right, as well as the connections among these attacks against LGBT education, access to transition, access to abortion and critical race theory.

Also discussed are some limitations of a legalization framework around abortion, as opposed to a decriminalization, the limits of liberalism (particularly liberal feminism), and also the ways that certain strains of feminism contribute to an anti-trans discourse. Finally, there is chat about how to approach people needing support people who need access to healthcare, whether it be transition or abortion, outside of the hands of the state.

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TFSR - Amar: Thank you so much, Sophie, for coming onto the show. I'm super excited that you're here. Would you, just to get us started, introduce yourself with your name, correct gender pronouns, if you wish, and speak a bit about what you do and what your interests are?

Sophie Lewis: Thanks so much for having me on. My name is Sophie Lewis, I'm a they/she pronouns person. I am a writer living in Philadelphia since 2017. I also teach courses on critical theory online at the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research. And I'm also a recovering or ex-academic. I've got British and German dual nationality, but I grew up in France. I'm very placeless in my background, and I'm trying to make Philly home in a meaningful way. I recently heard someone say that "small C communists" are just anarchists that went to Grad School. I felt read to filth by that, I'm not gonna lie. I am interested in anti-work theory, unorthodox Marxisms, and critical utopianism. I'm interested in trans, disability, and health liberation frameworks. I'm interested in reproductive justice. And I'm interested in the destruction of properterian kinship. And I share with my beautiful partner Vicky Osterweil – who I believe is a friend of your show – a strong interest in film and literature. I've never seen a dumb heteronormative reality TV show I don't want to wax theoretical about.

Amar: That's beautiful.

Scott: Thank you so much for coming on. I'm so excited to talk to you. Your views and analysis on things are always super insightful and helpful to me. So I'm really glad that you're willing to come to talk to us.

Amar: I know that we are going to ask for another interview with you about your work on abolishing the nuclear family unit, as we know about, but would you speak a little bit about some of your past work, as well as some influences that you have or inspirations you had when writing or conceptualizing those works?

Sophie: Yes, great. My work in the past is varied. It's funny, the thing that some people nowadays associate with me the most, i.e. more so than my book that you mentioned, is my essay "My Octopus Girlfriend", which is to say, I got in trouble on social media a couple of years ago for my feelings concerning the queerness of octopuses. And we can talk about that another time if you want. But I do think it's interesting to bring this

up, partly because my more-than-human commitments and my commitments to the erotic do seem to be one of the reasons why there are plenty of people in the so-called normie left, at least online, who consider me in this moment of red-brown triangulation in so many words a degenerate.

But anyhow, in 2019– I guess... *Full Surrogacy Now* was published by Verso Books in 2019, and that book loosely represented my Ph.D., which was in geography, and what the hell is geography anyway? At the University of Manchester in England, I think geography is a place for all the odds and ends and ragtag misfits of academia and humanities disciplines to end up if they want to be abolitionists or anarchists or Marxists. Anyway, it's called *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*, and to be honest, I don't think Verso Books or I expected anyone to read it. And things did turn out differently. It's not a book, as they finally understood around the time that the paperback came out two years later, about the service or arrangement commonly known as surrogacy, so much as it is a family abolitionist manifesto for gestators. But that part about family abolition was a cause of much interest and so in October, I have a clarifying follow-up about that part of the politics, coming out. It's very short. It's called *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation*, also with Verso or Salvage editions. I clarify this family abolition component. And especially, I extend its anti-racist dimensions a lot more. So I'm excited to talk to you about that in a future episode.

In general, I write a lot about reproduction and critical utopianism, which is why my handle is reproutopia. Although I guess once upon a time, I thought that that would be some professional handle. Whereas my rabble-rousing one would remain @lasofa or whatever, but I just can't I can't split myself that way. I just can't do it, which is probably one of the reasons why I don't have a job. Sometimes, I think I'm not even sure I believe in reproduction. Because maybe there's no such thing. Maybe there's only cogenerative coproduction, but you get the idea. I write against private property, I write against biogenetic property, I write against eugenics, I hope, and against patriarchal motherhood, the private nuclear household, and the privatization of care.

You might be interested to hear that I cut my teeth politically doing climate justice, direct action, and anti-austerity student stuff while I was an undergrad between 2007 and 2011, I was hanging out with anarchists and anarcho-feminists in the UK. And after that point, I was quite traumatized by getting beaten up by riot cops in Copenhagen where we were mobilizing for climate justice at COP 15. And I became really unable

to think about climate individually or write about it. Instead, I'm part of a collective called Out of the Woods – which is not very active right now – but which published a book called *Hope Against Hope: Writings on Ecological Crisis* with Common Notions Press. And basically, it's only when I'm being with them that I can bear to think about ecocide head-on.

You also asked about my influences. I'd say my big theoretic influences include decolonial and ecological sex radicals like Kim TallBear and Angela Willey. And then obviously family abolitionists, like the inventor of the word feminism Charles Fourier, the 19th century French Socialist Utopian and the left Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai, and then sex worker liberationists femi babylon and Amber Hollibaugh, and anti-work philosophers like Kathi Weeks and Tiffany Lethabo King, problematic faves like Shulamith Firestone, and the early Donna Haraway, I'm just listing all my favorites. So the insurgent social reproduction theorists, basically, I'm thinking Francis Beal of the Third World Women's Alliance, or the Black women of Wages for Housework, Wages Due Lesbians in the 70's. I do visit the 70's quite a lot. And at this point, I've written a ton of essays for magazines and journals, since I'm trying to earn my living as a freelancer. Albeit I wouldn't be making ends meet if I didn't also teach. And I wouldn't be making ends meet if 250 people didn't kindly patronize me. I get \$1,000 a month on Patreon. That's my only dependable source of income. Thank you to people who do that.

Amar: That's lovely. And will probably ask you how people can support you on Patreon at the end of the show, or if you want to say it now.

Sophie: Oh, bless you. Yeah, it's patreon.com/reproutopia. I appreciate it.

Amar: Hell yeah! You said you draw a lot from the 70s. And I think the 70s just gave us so much emergent thought crafting. I listened to an interview that you gave on This is Hell, that podcast in which you mentioned a friend of the show, the novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which I was really sparked by and very interested to– Maybe we'll save that as a teaser for our discussion on Abolishing the Family and such topics.

TSFR-Scott: I'm really excited about the way that you're picking up on some of those legacies from the radical movements then, and one of the things that you just said that maybe could roll into the discussion

and something that we can talk about is your intervention seems to be within what is called, in feminism, social reproduction theory. But I like how you were backing away from that term and talking about cogenerative. When we talk about social reproduction, we get caught in reproducing the same over and over again. And I really think about how the things that we do right now maybe can stop that endless repetition. But it does seem to be what is on the hook right now – what kind of world is being reproduced? Can we end that? And is it going to be ended in a good way or a really scary way?

Sophie: Yes, absolutely. Pretty much agree.

Scott: Maybe you can transition to the point of our current discussion, though, I'm excited for the future one. It is thinking about what's happening at this moment socially, and legislatively, with ramping up attacks on trans people and reproductive self-determination. Why do you think this is happening right now? What created the conditions for trans people to be under the target, youth, in particular, is weaponized by the far right, and why is this the moment that finally we're seeing the culmination of decades of work against abortion?

Sophie: Really great opening question, albeit quite difficult, I'll do my best. And thinking about the process of hollowing out of the political center that we've been seeing, I think, for some time. And the hollowing out of the center creates conditions in which marginalized groups can be flung sacrificially under the bus. This is complicated, but it seems to me that because of the extraordinary success of Black Lives Matter the establishment wants to– it's not that they ever had to choose one or the other or their white supremacy isn't still part of the DNA of every political maneuver by the ruling class in this country...But I think there is a pivot towards the sex panic specifically. And again, just to be clear, it's always racialized at the same time, but I think the marginalized group to be scapegoated and panicked morally about is– You can think about Hillary Clinton's "Black thugs."

I think currently, the same people are worried very much about these two figures, the predatory trans woman and the mutilated child. And there are other reasons: the crisis of care throws up these specters. The end-of-empire panic about futurity expresses itself via demographic anxieties, right? On the far-right, it's replacement theory and white geno-

cide. That same anxiety is across the political spectrum. And that demographic anxiety about the survival of America as a settler colony enacts itself on the bodies of children whose fertility becomes fetishized.

What else? Capitalism needs to discipline the non-reproductive and the inadequately or incorrectly reproductive. I'm not doing a great job and just throwing out phenomena that I think are relevant. We are living inside the legacies of the pedophile industrial complex of the 80's. The really significant reconstruction of the political landscape in the US around the carceralist figure of the innocent child, the figure to be protected at all costs on the basis of a-sexuality and, weirdly, fertility. This is the part that I think people don't get enough about the figure of the cisgender or cissexual child that everybody wants to save right now. It's creepy. It's an avatar of fertility, that child, it is an avatar of the future.

In your notes to me before we began this talk, you mentioned Lee Edelman's book, which is justly criticized for its slightly nuanced opposition to the maternal or the reproductive or whatever. But Lee Edelman's book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* talks about the "fascism of the baby's face", or the way in which all Politics requires this figure of the child to transmit and defer and displace any possible transformation into the future. I've been trying to think about whether that's all that's going on. Very specifically, in a time of demographic crisis and weird replacement-theory type panic, weirdly, it's literally the genitals and the reproductive organs of literal cisgender children that become spectral-ly present at the front and center of so much political discourse. How's that? What do you think?

Amar: It is just deeply creepy. As you said, when it's broken down that way, when we're fixating so heavily on the reproductive capability of, in some cases, literal babies, infants, and it just reminds me of the very profound extent to which cisheteronormative society just really thinks about children as property, which is codified into law too. It's just very disturbing and creepy.

Scott: I was just thinking, it's interesting, in my studies of gay Liberation stuff from the 70's, reading Guy Hocquenghem, he's saying that the price for a certain gay man to get some rights and acceptance in society would basically necessitate the casting out of figures of the trans woman and the pedophile. And he had this prescient view of it in the very beginning of gay liberation, and I feel we're seeing the combi-

nation of it. But the way that as people, the three of us raised in this pedophile industrial complex, it's always very strange to me... How it creates this weird situation, where children are unnecessarily sexualized, and all these moments where things don't need to be fraught or weird at all. And people are worried about this stuff. And it's actually, to me, always ends up pointing to the family as this really creepy scenario where there are parents obsessing over their children?

Sophie: Yes, absolutely. There's so much to say, I'm just worried that if I jump on your points about parental rights, we'll rhizomatically follow who knows what kinds of paths. The very fundamentally racial character of the institution of parenthood should probably be noted, at least in passing. This goes back to elemental Black feminist theorizing around how Black gestators under chattel slavery in the United States were cast out from the domain of dyadic cisgender, precisely because they could not be inscribed in the social order as mothers. They were not the mothers in the sense of motherhood, the institution of property, really, of parental ownership over the product of their gestational labor. And that casting out from parentality also meant an ungendering of enslaved racialized Black "flesh." To quote Hortense Spillers who actually uses that language of "ungendered flesh." And this is still deeply relevant, the eugenic entanglements of all mainstream discourse about who should and should not reproduce in the United States today. It's interesting to think about the intersections between that almost racializing definition of proper and improper parents. And there's a contradiction that we're seeing right now, the very same politicians who advocate parental rights, when it comes to things white parents on school boards banning "critical race theory" or anti-racist materials, they then willingly embrace separating trans kids from their parents. Anyway, I'll pause there.

Scott: That's a great transition. And this is something we wanted to talk about. It was really important that you brought up that racialized history of the property and also of the gendering and ungendering according to your racial positionality of parenthood. This is one of the things – that's linking the current fascist agenda. You brought up critical race theory, we're seeing all attacks against any education around queerness in whatever form, the access to transition, or care around transition, for youth in particular, but it's also extending to adults, and then abortion more recently. And this idea of parental rights seems to

be one of the organizing ideas. So if there's more that you wanted to say around that, I'd be interested just because it feels like such a strange invocation. Also, drag shows as a particular focus. The youth drag shows is something that people are getting really worked up about right now.

Sophie: Yeah, as you say, these links are among the prongs of attack. It is a successful and well-organized banning of anti-racism and queerness appearing in school spaces. Who is the congressman who was brandishing just a couple of days ago Anti-racist Baby, the infants' book? There's a real obsession with the idea of the infant, even not the child, but literally the neonate learning about America's history in school. And there's a criminalization, as you say, at the same time, of trans-affirming childcare and abortion, of gestational labor stoppages – as I would also encourage us to reframe them, or at least also think of them as. All of these, as you say, can be linked directly to the project of parental rights. And they reflect specifically a vision of patriarchal familist authority that cannot be disentangled from whiteness and from a totally triumphalist flattened ahistoricism – a version of history that is entirely made up.

We need to pay more attention to the way that this Republican-allied Christo-fascist series of maneuvers going on all these fronts that you mentioned are part of a project to reinstall the supremacy of the family. I was reading a dialogue between Andrea Long Chu and Paisley Currah in *Jewish Currents Today*. They were right to highlight together the Christo-fascist series of associations, which in a way– I almost want to say they're right, it's annoying to have to constantly almost want to say that our very worst enemies understand the material stakes of the private nuclear households' links to all of these historical forms of domination: from enslavement and colonialism to patriarchy and so on. They understand that better than the liberal establishment, they understand the stakes. Andrea Long Chu and Paisley Currah we're talking about the line of connection in their minds, the Christo-fascists' minds, between abortion which disrupts the family and things like marriage equality or whatever, and the specter of trans freaks molesting YOUR kids in public bathrooms. They are linked in our enemies' minds. They are all assaults on the– Angela Metropulos is another theorist I'm thinking of, who I am, unfortunately, not as acquainted with as I would like. But I think her theorization of this is probably more and more needed right now, as Christo-fascism spirals into more and more power in a way on this territory. She talks about the oikos and how capital and settler colonialism discipline this sphere by

very violent attacks. On improper bodily pleasures that fall with outside of the domain of productivity and reproductivity. That's why all of these different fronts at the same time, although they are insufficiently linked in the mainstream conversation.

Amar: Absolutely. When you were talking and using the very correct framework of Cristo-fascism to politically frame the dominant shift that's going on right now, I couldn't really help but think about how *The Handmaid's Tale* is used to describe this and the shortcomings of that analysis. Do you have any ideas about that?

Sophie: It's actually interesting because you probably know that I had for several years a real bee in my bonnet about *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood's fertility apocalypse, or sterility apocalypse rather. But I want to actually say but, I'm beginning to think that I might have almost gone a tiny bit too far, there might have been an element of overreach in my annoyance, because Angela Metropulos pulled me up a little bit on this, because I'm broadly speaking, and I'm also not the first to say it, but beginning in about 2017, I began to lose my temper. The Handmaid mania of liberal feminism. And so I actually wrote several pieces, and there's a bit in the very beginning of *Full Surrogacy Now* where I expressed this distemper about the bizarre psychic under tow of handmaid mania. I say provocatively that it's a utopia, not a dystopia in a sense because what all the people cosplaying as handmaids in Gilead are unconsciously acting out is a desire for this world where women herd has been flattened back into pure gestationality. And wouldn't that be nice because then you wouldn't have class-conscious or decolonial or trans or Black feminists critiquing you all the time? Because as the op-eds kept saying, "We are literally living in Gilead." If that were true, then you would be, as a cis pregnant white woman like Elizabeth Moss in the Hulu adaptation, the very most oppressed subject of America, right?

And it's like "Okay, that actually happened. It happened to enslaved Black women, forced surrogacy is not made up." And to some extent, Margaret Atwood was constantly saying that everything in her dystopias has happened before, but that's very much not how it's taken up. It's not taken up as an anti-racist consciousness. It's not taken up in a way that connects to reproductive justice struggles or centers the reproductive justice concerns of organizers from the South. But the thing that really is still number one, as enemy in women's lives, is capitalism. It's not theo-

cratic fascists with guns. I feel now that Angela might have been right that there's no need to downplay the danger of the Christo-fascists in order to criticize the de-racialized slave narrative that is *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Scott: I love the way that you analyze that, but I see what you're saying. Going back to the family, we're in the last however many decades in a place where people are living perhaps less and less – and what I mean by people is people typically within the dominant form, in the more represented white suburban situations are living less than less – in that typical nuclear family. And yet, the idea of the family hasn't really been knocked down as a controlling image, especially within TV, sitcoms, even if it's a work show, it's a family structure, right? It's everywhere, but we're not living in those things. And likewise, with the issues around abortion, there's this idea that we're progressing away from these really oppressive things. And I feel even for leftists and anarchists, there's a blind spot or an unwillingness to let go of the roots of our society that we live in, that is structuring all this oppression that we're living in now, because of this faith in a progress, that we've made some strides away from the thing.

The Christian fascist thing really points out to me, that what we're seeing right now is a minority group taking power. The system that is in place that ostensibly holds checks against them, the people who are inhabiting those positions are completely unwilling to check them. They're letting it happen. All the people, the president, they're not doing anything. So on one level, Christian fascism seems ridiculous, but we're literally seeing these peoples seize power, and no one is really doing anything about it. I can see also why that's utopian to be "Oh, we finally understand what woman is, it's reproduction" or whatever. Maybe you have some thoughts about the progress narrative and the way that facts are negating that.

Sophie: I think you're absolutely right. The liberal mainstream is almost capable of noticing or saying that there's a civil war right around the corner, but they literally do not intend to fight in it. It is so cognitively maddening. It's almost as though that liberal establishment doesn't intend to do a single thing, just as it didn't in order to defend abortion because it imagined that its Republican dancing partners would play fair against all evidence to the contrary. Progressive narratives are an epistemic canker, it's so difficult to completely get rid of, even when one knows better. We're

just swimming in this idea of “history as progress,” and you can never overstate the importance of unthinking it, unpicking it.

It almost gives me hope that there is so much rage right now against the Democrats and their non-response to the striking down of Roe. What could be done is to frame the fight back in terms of very much politics, not ethics – mass gestational labor power, prole power, not individual personal freedom, in a sense, and not individual tragedies, and also, not these terrible spectacular rising tactics that some pro-choicers are using right now, where they’re brandishing blood-stained white pants and coat hangers, and talking about “we won’t go back” and insisting that “thousands will die and backstreet abortions”. Why is that the imaginary, it’s not actually helpful? We are actually in a historically different era. They can surveil and police and incarcerate, and we need to get really good at organizing against that and de-arresting people and blocking their ability to charge people. We need to get really good at evading and operating undercover.

But it’s also really important to think about the time we are in and the future we could build, rather than– I feel we won’t go back imagining that the reproductive status quo ante was okay. Abortions are overwhelmingly safe today. Regardless of whether or not they’re legal. I feel that there’s this bizarre attachment to a Margaret Atwood-flavored catastrophe. We’re literally going to all die because of the abortions themselves. But no, actually, that’s not what’s primarily going to happen. It’s much worse in a sense. I’m not saying incarceration is worse than death. But the real story that this is is a prison abolition story. Yet again, this is an abolitionist lesson. The problem of abortion being criminalized, is an over-criminalization problem, it’s a prison industrial complex problem. It’s a police abolition problem. I’m not sure that really links to your progress narrative point, but it links it to one of the big movements that have swept the “national conversation” in recent years, which is “one thing has to change, which is everything”. It’s not a question of making little meliorative steps towards a better world.

Scott: That’s really important what you said, I just wanted to pick up on it. The way that these laws are being crafted, that is increasing surveillance, increasing criminalization, increasing the possibilities of incarceration, so there’s increased state power there, which is maybe also why the liberals and Democrats in power are not so against it because it’s a boon for the State. But then the other thing that I’m thinking

about is how all these laws are deputizing citizens to be informants. That also, to me, speaks to the nascent fascism, which leads to vigilante groups or paramilitary formations of people seeking out who's doing this, or crossing state lines to track people down? So, I just thought that was really important that you brought up the way that the criminalization aspect of it works. And it shifts the focus around the liberal reaction of performing grief around something that's not actually live for them at the moment, too. I just wanted to pull that out.

On the other side of the progress narrative, there's the long-running anarchist or anarchistic critiques of legalizing abortion because of the way that incorporated the grassroots formations of caring for gestators and childbirth and ending childbirth outside of professionalization, or outside of institutionalization dominated by men, in particular, patriarchal power structures. So I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about any of that. Or what we can learn from that perspective now in response to this, which feels so upsetting, but maybe there's other avenues of response?

Sophie: You're absolutely right. The fact is so much of Turtle Island has been operating in a post-Roe reality for so long. I don't know how much that is really real to people. We've been post-Roe in a combined and uneven way for some time. This is the zombie lag of it becoming law. People understand, in the places where it's been de facto post-Roe for years and years, that abortion care happens outside of professional structures and independently of experts. And there is also quite a wide understanding that Roe absolutely sucked in the first place, even before the Hyde Amendment gutted it, and even before the Casey ruling gutted it still further, Roe vs Wade absolutely sucked. And to the extent that it even legalized abortion, which we have to say isn't even really clear that it did that, it legalized a woman's or a family's right to have a private conversation with a health care provider or whatever.

But we have to ask ourselves, "What good is legalization and why do we want that?" You call it an anarchist critique of the legalizing of abortion. It absolutely is that. It is also actually a critique that used to be quite common across the board in the 70's and the 60's. They achieved this pyrrhic victory of Roe in 1973. What if we want laws off our bodies, and indeed an end to all laws, rather than laws that legalized anything we might do without laboring uteri, and what if we want the repeal of all abortion laws, not just the bad ones? In terms of the mainstream conver-

sation, for sure, this perspective has been pretty widely lost over the last four decades. But it's not really just a post-Roe critique, it was actually primarily a pre-Roe critique. I like to call it "gestational decrim"? They used to say, "Off our backs." The idea is that we get the state completely off and out of our flesh, not just its punitive functions, but also its supposedly benign regulatory functions. And the term gestational decrim is basically something I floated. I don't know if it's gonna take off. But it's an analogy to the sex work liberation movements call for decrim, as you well know. Comrades have tirelessly made the distinction between partial legalization and regulation, the so-called Nordic model, which is terrible for workers, and full decriminalization.

Amar: On the topic of operating sublegally, there, as many listeners probably know, is a group called Jane's Revenge that is seemingly attempting to destabilize pro-life or forced birth infrastructures. Could you talk about that a little bit? Just talk about what's been in the news, and also some of your thoughts on how it's been received and how we might think about it in a more productive way.

Sophie: I wish I had every single fact about Jane's Revenge at my fingertips. I'm just gonna talk in generalities in the aftermath of the Supreme Court leak striking down Roe, a shadowy anarchist network calling itself Jane's Revenge was reported on a lot, striking via graffiti actions, and allegedly, also a Molotov cocktail, some windows smashing. The graffiti tag that was used in various locales, and as you mentioned, the targets, Jane's Revenge was targeting Crisis Pregnancy Centers, which are fake abortion clinics that are funded by the far-right to psychologically guilt and dissuade people from getting abortion care. There was reporting on Jane's Revenge that their tag was "If Abortions Aren't Safe, Then Neither Are You." I have to say I love it. It makes a huge difference if you have a cervix. The terrain of symbolic solidarity is actually quite significant.

There is this extreme minority capture of this issue that makes out, this thing that really everyone supports, actually, the majority of people in America totally like abortion. If you're into electoral politics, which I'm not, but when you campaign about abortion, it's quite cheering, it's actually one of the few things that are fun and uplifting to go knocking on people's doors about because everyone likes abortion. And that is not present in the symbolic sphere. So when someone breaks a CPC window, or— I live in Philadelphia, I was driving around and saw a big billboard in

the aftermath of the leak that just said “Abortion is still legal in Pennsylvania”, which might seem a small thing, but when you have a cervix and you’re walking around in the aftermath of a ruling like that, something has shifted. Even if you know that concretely, not that much has shifted for many people, it’s symbolic violence that renders you less than a person. And it is a great act of love to let people know that the violence they are meting out against gestators is hated and will not be tolerated.

My opinion is not really the point so much, I would just say that anyone calling themselves a feminist or leftist could maybe, at the very minimum, not do the right-wing’s job for them and go out of their way to write op-eds condemning Jane’s Revenge, as Judith Levine did in *The Intercept*. And I was extremely, extremely angry about that. I couldn’t understand why it was necessary of all things at this moment. I don’t know if she’s noticed. I don’t mean to single out Judith Levine. Of course, she’s not the only one. She’s a leftist feminist. A lot of feminists have been condemning Jane’s Revenge for some reason. And it makes me despair a little bit.

Yeah. Facebook, or Meta ruled that Jane’s Revenge was a tier-one terrorist organization. And so any posts expressing neutral or positive sentiments about the actions of Jane’s Revenge will be deleted from Facebook? Apparently, there’s no one on that list of tier-one terrorist organizations other than al Qaeda. It’s actually absurd. And earlier this month, Axios reported that assaults directed at abortion clinic staff and patients increased 128% compared with 2020. There are 4,000 names on the dangerous individuals and organizations list and only 2 are associated with anti-abortion terrorism. But as we know, it’s the supposed pro-life camp that has bombed and murdered people for 40 years. It just seems extremely strange to back up the casting of Jane’s Revenge as terrorists when they are some of the few brave, symbolic actors in solidarity with all the people who have had their bodily autonomy stripped from them by the Supreme Court.

Scott: Yeah, it’s so interesting, because the liberal or even leftists, like the Judith Levine piece are like, “Militancy is great. Violence isn’t good.” But you read the pieces that the people who are calling themselves Jane’s Revenge put out, they are very explicit and clear in their definitions of violence, and what they’re responding to, which you mentioned, is this campaign of literal physical violence against people? Not! They’re targeting empty buildings. It’s property again, right?

It's how it comes back into it. They're not doing the same thing. Other than the people who are continuing to do abortion care, as they had been doing in, as you also rightly mentioned, that places where Roe didn't really matter, those people who can't be very public about the work that they're doing, Jane's Revenge is maybe the only visible effective, perhaps, action that's being taken. Besides the futile protests against buildings or whatever that people do. Also, it's really exciting because it's reproducible and anonymous, right? It's a meme or whatever.

Amar: I love it. To approach all of this with an eye to hypocrisy is to maybe participate in an exercise of driving yourself up the wall. But the hypocrisy of somebody approaching these actions with hand-wringing about violence is pretty backward and very establishment and harmful and also boring.

There's so much to say about abortion and there's so much to talk about with how people's rights are being war-of-attritioned away and how much of those rights actually truly didn't exist. It was no walk in the park to get an abortion before, a month ago, it was actually quite difficult and more so for folk who live in trigger states and folk who live in chronically unresourced or deresourced places. I would actually really love to hear about your take on the whole groomer discourse that is being levied at trans people specifically, but gay people more generally. Do you have any thoughts about that? And how does that tie into these moments that we're collectively experiencing?

Sophie: I suppose I already covered some of my thoughts about the weaponized innocence of the figure of the Child. And I suppose this links to the way that— None of this can actually adequately be tackled, including in progressive or socialist, or whatever liberal frames of trans solidarity or allyship, without actually going as far, getting as deep as the principle of youth or child liberation, or youth or child sovereignty. Which is totally lost, it was totally successfully destroyed by the 80's and by the pedophile industrial complex being built. It's just off the map more or less, apart from on the fringes of radical movements and, of course, there are wonderful things that are going on. There's the Purple Thistle, a youth-led community center in Vancouver, carla bergman is an anarchist, reproductive justice militant, and zine archivist who has a book coming out with AK Press called Listen To Kids. There exists consciousness about the importance of

actually countering the property logic around kids and including or better than including children in the political process, but it's just completely fringe. I don't think that we can actually successfully counter the entire narrative about groomers without actually advocating for something like children and youth liberation. Because groomers are just an outgrowth of the properterian fantasy that, as you mentioned, really weirdly sexualizes the children within the tiny little bubble of the private nuclear household based on oedipal kinship, which is a very strange sexual structure between parents and children, which pretends that it is asexual and projects all of its strange hyper fixated sexuality onto this predatory other.

And it requires children to be literally art canvases, pieces of inheritance, who do not have desires, who do not have sexualities above all, who cannot make friends across generations, and who cannot dictate or negotiate their own boundaries vis-a-vis each other or elders or whatever, and who will be irrevocably harmed by the company of a drag queen. It's just so boring and so endless, there's an endless well of this in our culture right now. And I've obviously been called a groomer because anyone who talks about queer theory in the public sphere will be called a groomer and a pedophile by TERFs and Gender-Criticals and fascists, etc. And it's terrifying, right? It's really terrifying. The left has not got a great strategy worked out about how to be effective in defense against that and how to actually do solidarity with people being targeted by the pedophile industrial complex. I'd love to see more conversations about that.

Scott: Going back to the 70's, which keeps coming up for us, we're rehashing on the left the same splintering moments of those radical movements of the women's movement and gay liberation. They came together in certain areas around abortion and around cisgayness and then splintered around transness. And then the way that it's reformulating now where supposed radical feminists are taking sides with fascists and right-wingers is a really weird echo or return to that moment. But I wonder what you think about— With groomer, going back to the reproduction of the same and trying to reproduce something else, the threat of the trans child seems to me to be this idea that a kid has some autonomy to refuse the discipline and wages of gender that are forced upon them. And so in a way the groomers are pointing back at— Noah Zazanis wrote about this, too, that cis people are the most effectively groomed people. They're the ones who do the thing that they're made to do, and trans people are actually refusing grooming. But I wonder

what you think about this, the threat that gay and trans people play is that wherever reproduction we have to do of our community is not sexual reproduction. It's a different way of forming ourselves and our community. What do you think about the threat of transition and also the strange posthistory of anti-trans feminism?

Sophie: There are different things there. But perhaps, I don't know what the listenership tends to know and not know. So if you don't mind, I'll just state the obvious – or not for some people – about the strange interrelation. I do think it's important to disambiguate TERFs and Gender-Criticals and simple garden transphobes because sometimes when people hear these conversations from a position of relative unfamiliarity, there can be a real reaction against the seeming conflation of these things. It's important to state that the State is waging war on trans people, both adult and children, and it's polarized around the racialized, sex working figure of the trans woman of color, and then the figure of the potentially transed, seduced, groomed, potentially infertile trans child. And this war is being waged primarily in the United Kingdom, but increasingly in the United States and elsewhere. And many actors in this mobilization, which brings together secular right-wingers, Christo-fascists, and sadly, some people who are nominally on the left claim no connection with feminism. That's maybe obvious, right? However, there is also this presence in their ranks, and even sometimes at their home, especially in the UK. There's a significant number of self-identified radical feminists. That's what TERF means – trans-exclusionary radical feminist. This was a terminology brought about by someone who was cis rather than trans. The TERFs don't like being called TERFs, although it's very obviously a neutral descriptor. They pitch trans people's existence itself against the interests of womanhood, and they sometimes link this to a global patriarchal pharma capitalist conspiracy, which supposedly drives the phenomenon of transness. And this links up very beautifully with anti-semitic understandings of the world.

I sometimes think the only real difference between a gender-critical, which is another word for the general anti-trans component within feminism – not all of whom would call themselves radical feminists, so TERF is a specific subset of Gender-Critical – but sometimes the difference between a feminist transphobe, and a Christo-fascist woman, a Trad Wife who hates trans people, is the particular flavor vibe or orientation of their wounded attachment to a suffering-based definition of femaleness. So it's like do they relate psychically to their own femaleness in a tragic

way, which is the feminist transphobes way – we will be females, bleeding and dying in childbirth forever, it's what makes us sisters – or in a triumphal way, which is the Trad Wife belief, which is really, really inherent, you can hear it, sometimes they say out loud, but the most beautiful thing a woman can do for America is die in childbirth.

And in practice, the links between the feminist transphobes and the anti-feminist transphobes are very well-documented, I can definitely recommend the podcast Blood and TERF, which monitors these relationships. That's a podcast from the UK, the Heritage Foundation and funding bodies that are even to the right of them have sponsored British radical feminists traveling, advocating, and lecturing for over a decade at this point. I wrote in, of all places, the New York Times who asked me to write about this and explain TERFism's ideological roots. Why is TERFism so big in the UK? Alas, it was in 2019. Now, it seems it's a globally known phenomenon because of JK Rowling's uptake of it. In my opinion, its ideological roots are in eugenic feminism, including specifically colonial English women's feminist efforts to impose a certain hygiene in India and Africa about a century ago.

But you asked me also about the good news of this confrontation today. There is a real need on the part of capitalist order today to de-fang that disruptive potential that you named in trans kids and to contain the possibilities of trans insurrection within what Nat Raha calls Trans Liberalism. And it's really working. There is a spilling over, there is a recognition that there's refusals of reproductive and productivity type training of that cis heteronormative grooming that Noah Zazanis talks about. The links between that active refusal and all the other issues that we've been talking about in terms of work carcerality, the private character of care, the foreclosure of the future in white national reproduction, and so on. When I'm feeling optimistic, there is an insurgency of feminism against cisness taking place. Emma Heaney talks about feminism against cisness. And she turns the history of feminism on its head and historicizes the moment when it became cis, which it was not, to begin with. And the long-standing and currently very potentially powerful insurgency of feminists of all genders against cisness threatens the social order by potentially decommodifying, deprivatizing, and reorienting away from production and reproduction all of the means of collective life-making.

And the question we can ask ourselves, this is from Kay Gabriel, what would it mean for gender to function as a source of disalienated pleasure rather than as an accumulation strategy? And the proliferation

of the means of transition doesn't necessarily but potentially contains a whispered invitation towards exploring that question.

Scott: I love what you just said. That, in my mind, could be a really good last thing to say.

Sophie: We've been talking for ages. I've taken up so much of your evening. Actually, sometimes it's good to just quit while you're ahead. I feel you're right. Maybe that's a nice note to end on. We can always think about everything we wish we said and note it down so that our next podcast can potentially– It's lovely!

Amar: I love it.

Sophie: It's a real pleasure speaking to you two. It really is.

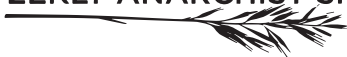
Amar: The feeling is super, super mutual. I might just ask in closing, is there anything, a notion that you would leave listeners with or parting words that you would say to them?

Sophie: That's a lovely question. I feel everyone has seen this quote, but it makes me happy when it circulates in times of despair. And it's that quote from Ursula Le Guin about how the power of capitalism seems immutable, but so did the power of kings under feudalism. When I'm feeling up optimistic right now, I'm realizing that the center cannot hold, there is no center anymore. There is a very real sense in which – and this is very scary – masses of our siblings and neighbors are coming to grips for the first time with the fact that we take care of ourselves, the state does not take care of us, and maybe that provides an opening.

Amar: Indeed, I love that so much. Thank you so much for those words and that provocation that's really important to keep in mind always, but perhaps especially now.

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